

BOOK REVIEW OF JONATHAN STROUD'S *LOCKWOOD & CO.: THE SCREAMING STAIRCASE*

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Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Literature is an artwork from the expression of human's feeling and mind. One example for that artwork is novel. There are many novels that human has produced. With different theme, style and storyline, novel becomes a material reading in human world, especially for entertainment. In *Theory of Literature*, Wellek and Warren state, "Literature cannot be 'studied' at all. We can only read, enjoy and appreciate it. Overall, we can only accumulate all kinds of information about literature" (1948:15). With that many themes of the novels that human has made, one of the themes that are interesting is horror. Horror usually has connection with mysterious things. With those mysteries, people will get the atmosphere, the feeling and the thought of the story. Sometimes, they will get the terror of the horror itself and make them shudder. They will try to solve the case while reading it as well. Even though, some unexpected accidents that happen will break the assumptions they have made as they read the novel.

Lockwood and Co.: The Screaming Staircase, by Jonathan Stroud as the author, tells about Psychological Investigations Agencies that have job to destroy the dangerous ghosts. One of those agencies is called Lockwood and Co. It is an

agency that is run by three young employees. They have their own talents to solve their clients' problems. Nevertheless, when one of their cases goes horribly wrong, the agency has to pay sixty thousand pounds for the damage they do. They do not have the money to pay it directly. However, they have one last chance to pay the charge and make a comeback even if they have to put their lives on. They have to solve the Problem in the Combe Carey hall, one of the most haunted houses in England with the famous horrors that are known as The Bloody Terrors of "Red Room" and The Screaming Staircase.

Lockwood and Co.: The Screaming Staircase is reviewed because it is an interesting story that the three young employees have to bet their lives in order to save the agency by fighting against dangerous ghosts. It attracts the reader to feel the horrors and terrors of the story. It will be interesting and make them shudder as they read it. The writer chooses *The Screaming Staircase* because this novel has a story full of suspense, humour and truly horrifying ghosts. It will give horror, terror and funny sides while reading it.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to give a review about novel entitled *Lockwood and Co.: The Screaming Staircase* in the intrinsic elements of the novel, especially in theme, characters, setting and style. Furthermore, the other objective is to analyze the aspects of strengths and weaknesses of the novel.

1.3 Jonathan Stroud and His Works

Born in 1970 in Bedford, England, Jonathan Stroud began to write his first stories at the age of seven. After he completed his studies of English literature at the University of York, he worked in London as an editor of children's books. During the 1990s he started publishing his own works and quickly gained success.

In May 1999, Jonathan published his first children's novel, *Buried Fire*, which was the first of a line of fantasy/mythology children's books.

Among his most prominent works are the bestselling *Bartimaeus Trilogy*. A special feature of these novels compared to others of their genre is that Stroud upends the stereotypes of the "good magician" and the "bad demon" when the sarcastic and slightly egomaniac djinni, Bartimaeus, describes an alternate version of the modern world in which power is held by corrupt magicians. The books in this series are *The Amulet of Samarkand*, *The Golem's Eye*, and *Ptolemy's Gate*, his first books to be published in the United States.

Stroud lives in St Albans, Hertfordshire, with his daughter Isabelle and his wife Gina, an illustrator of children's books.

2. Summary of Jonathan Stroud's *Lockwood & Co.: The Screaming Staircase*

For more than fifty years, London has been affected by a horrifying epidemic of ghosts. A number of Psychic Investigations Agencies have sprung up to destroy the dangerous apparitions. Lockwood and Co. is one of agency companies in London that run business specializing in the containment and destruction of ghosts. It is an independent agency with three employees; they are Anthony Lockwood, Lucy Carlyle and George Cubbins, and without a supervisor. Anthony Lockwood acts as the person in charge of the company. It is not in the payroll of Department of Psychical Research and Control (DEPRAC). So, they get paid from the clients for solving their problems.

In one of their cases, Anthony Lockwood and Lucy Carlyle make a horribly wrong. They burn the house of their client down. They almost get killed from the

dangerous ghost in that case, so there is no other way for them except to use Greek's Fire to fight the ghost. But, the fire soon burns up the fragments of wood in the room. They only have one way that is to jump off from the second floor of the house because the fire has become bigger on the other directions. There is no other way of escaping except jumping off from the second floor of the house, so they force themselves to jump off from second floor and land on the whopping bushes down there.

Unfortunately, Lockwood and Co. agency has to pay sixty thousand pounds to Mrs. Hope, the owner of the house that they burn down. Besides, the news about that accident has spread in all over London. It makes some of their clients' requests decrease because many clients cancel their requests. *Lockwood and Co.* become an agency that will face a ramshackle condition because of that. Also, DEPRAC will dissolve the agency if they cannot pay the charge of Mrs. Hope and other punishments as they break the rules that DEPRAC has decided.

Lockwood and Lucy have a chance to turn the situation back. That chance can cover the money they need to pay to Mrs. Hope and it will shut the DEPRAC's mouth up. Mr. Fairfax, the Chairman of Fairfax Iron Company, hires them with high payment to solve problem of ghosts in one of his houses called Combe Carey Hall. Mr. Fairfax is a businessman that runs a business as the provider of tools to fight the ghosts in England. Combe Carey Hall is a house where many ghosts gather at there. That house is considered as the most haunted house in English. That is why Lockwood takes that chance even though he knows how dangerous the house is and he can lose his own life. As the leader of agency, he has responsibility to keep his agency running. So, he dares to take that offer. Besides, he also thinks something is wrong when Mr. Fairfax specially asks his agency to take care ghosts in his house, even though, there are many agencies out there that have many employees and better facilities, like Fittes or Rotwell, than his agency. So,

he doesn't just take that offer without thinking because he knows that he and his companions bet their lives in this request.

Combe Carey Hall horror atmosphere has touched Lockwood and his friends feeling when they arrive there. In there, they have to face the two best-known tales in the neighborhood concerning the Red Room and the Screaming Staircase. They finish the job soon after they find the main source of the ghosts. Their long struggles against ghost are over. Then, Lockwood start revealing the reasons why he takes this request to Lucy and George and it shocks them. There is connection between Mr. Fairfax case and ghost case in Mrs. Hope's house. That explains the reason why Mr. Fairfax choose Lockwood's agency to take care ghosts in his mansion. That's why, Lockwood takes this request with care and serious.

3. Review of Jonathan Stroud's Lockwood & Co.: The Screaming Staircase

3.1. The Strengths of Jonathan Stroud's Lockwood & Co.: The Screaming Staircase

3.1.1. Theme

Theme is the main point of a novel. It will show what kind of a novel the reader will read. An interesting theme will attract more readers to read the novel. They will become more curious about the story of the novel when they read the novel's brief description on the back cover. Additionally, Abrams states, "Theme is a salient abstract idea that emerges from a literary work's treatment of its subject matter; or a topic recurring in a number of literary works" (1999: 258). In this novel, it can be concluded that the theme of this novel is about responsibility.

From the character of Anthony Lockwood, the author shows the reader about how he struggles to protect the agency from out of business. He is responsible to take care of his employees, because he is the leader of the agency. This novel teaches the readers a lesson about being responsible to the people who work for us. Even though Anthony has to struggle in order to save the agency by betting his own life, taking care of his employees is also his responsibility. He knows that he only has small chance to succeed in solving the problems, but he still gives it a try. With the help of his employees, he manages to solve the problems. Without them, he will not able to solve it on his own effort. This novel also tells the readers about the beneficial point of depending on others in times of trouble will bring some good results in binding relationship, especially in making a friendship. The meaning of friendship between Anthony, Lucy and George became deeper and deeper.

3.1.2. Characters and Characterization

In every literary work, character always exists in the story, because it is the one that experiences the story. Scott Card argues that characters are fictitious people, human beings that are made up like real people, whole and alive, believable and worth caring about (1988: 4). Character can be made like a human that has life. It experiences many events like real people do. Therefore, it is like a symbol to the readers to be able to point directly which characters are involved in some events.

It is obvious that every character in a story has characterization. Without it, the story will not be clear for the readers because characterization makes people that are involved in the story have their own personalities and

characteristics. The readers, then, can decide which characters are good and which characters are bad as they read the story. Scott Card says that characterization is the description what the character does that will lead us to make judgment of it. We reach conclusions, know and discover something while we happen to be watching the character (1988: 4-5). Characterization will help the readers to understand the event that happens in the story and make them guess about the characters that are involved in a particular event. Moreover, the readers are led to make a conclusion about the characterizations of the characters in the story. Then, it will bring the readers to decide which one are characters they like and dislike.

In this novel, the characters are described in detail way by the author. The author uses the detailed sentences how those characters are like. It makes the readers understand and imagine those characters clearly. The readers, then, will find themselves to like a particular character in this novel.

3.1.2.1. Lucy Carlyle

Lucy is a new agent that Lockwood and Co. recruits. She is 15 years old. She also acts as the narrator in this novel. She has unusual sensitivity regarding the matters of ghosts.

From the first it was obvious that I was different. I had unusual sensitivity to matters relating to the Problem (Jonathan Stroud, 2013: 69).

Paragraph above shows that Lucy has a good talent since she was a child. Lucy's talent is the ability to hear ghosts much more clearly than others, and she is particularly sensitive to them in feeling the emotions that they

experienced while they were alive. Therefore, the readers can conclude that Lucy helps investigations in collecting the detailed information from the ghosts mainly with her talent in sensing the emotions of the ghosts.

3.1.2.2. Anthony Lockwood

Anthony Lockwood is the leader of Lockwood and Co. agency. He owns the agency that becomes official with DEPRAC accreditation. Lucy describes Lockwood as a person who has good passion and clear commitment. She already likes Lockwood's personality from the start.

Lockwood, I already liked. He seemed a world away from the remote and treacherous Agent Jacobs; his zest and personal commitment were clear. Here was someone I felt I could follow; someone perhaps to trust (Jonathan Stroud, 2013: 109).

Lockwood has clear purposes for the agency in the future. He is described as a funny, good-natured, dashing and a bit reckless yet a charismatic person. His talent is based on sight, which is much better than Lucy's and George's. His talent for hearing is poor, but his skill in using rapier is really good. Lockwood is thorough in dealing any problems. Especially, in the Combe Carey Hall case, he takes precaution and first moves in dealing this case. In this novel, the readers can see that Anthony is the wisest person in the agency.

3.1.2.3. George Cubbins

George Cubbins is Anthony's deputy. He is quite cynical to the people he meets. He says whatever he thinks, even if it is rude. Lucy describes George as someone who is plump and disgusting, as shown in paragraph below.

On the other: George Cubbins, handsome as a freshly opened tub of margarine, as charismatic as a wet tea towel lying scrumpled on the floor (Jonathan Stroud, 2013: 112).

George is smart when he does his research and experiment on ghosts. He takes much thorough research and preparation in getting information on the ghosts that they will face in field than the other two agents, Lockwood and Lucy. He prefers a longer waiting time between assignments. In this novel, the readers can assume that he has role as the thinker of the team.

3.1.3. Setting

Setting usually involves place, time and events that happen in the story. Sometimes, setting can be considered equal to milieu.

It has become a figure of speech to say that a story "takes place." But it is quite true: The characters must have a place in which to perform the acts that make up the story—the setting, the milieu of the tale. The milieu includes all the *physical locations* that are used—one city or many cities, one building or many buildings, a street, a bus, a farm, a clearing in the woods—with all the sights, smells, and sounds that come with the territory. The milieu also includes the *culture*—the customs, laws, social roles, and public expectations that limit and illuminate all that a character thinks and feels and says and does (Orson Scott Card, 1988: 49).

That means setting always involves where the characters take the event in particular places. Setting is not just a place, time, events, atmosphere as well as objects in a particular environment, but can also be mood-related attitudes, way of thinking, prejudice and lifestyle of a community in response to a particular problem that is involving character in it.

3.1.3.1. Setting of Time

In this novel, the year of the scenes that take place in the story is not shown directly. The readers are led to think about this thing by the author. By seeing the technology, where there are cable-telephone and weapons for the agents, the readers can conclude that the events in the story happen in the years around 1900s. In addition to those items, the readers can see that the prominent product is Rolls-Royce. It is a car that is produced around 1900s year.

A few minutes later the purr of a large vehicle sounded in the street. I peeped out, to see a shiny Rolls-Royce idling to a halt. It seemed to fill the road. It had polished silver-coated grilles upon the windows, and threads of silver tracery running down the sides. On the bonnet, a small silver figurehead glinted in the winter sun (Jonathan Stroud, 2013: 236).

3.1.3.2. Setting of Place

Set in a city stalked by many kinds of ghosts. General place is in England, especially London, where for more than fifty years, the country has been affected by an epidemic of haunting ghosts. A number of Psychic Investigations Agencies have appeared to destroy the dangerous apparitions. They take requests from the clients and get paid from it. In the beginning of the story, 62 Sheen Road is introduced as the place where Lockwood and Lucy face a type-two ghost named Annabel E. Ward, who haunts Mrs. Hope's house.

So it was not exactly an unblemished record that we took with us, Lockwood and I, when we walked up the path to 62 Sheen Road on that misty autumn afternoon and briskly rang the bell (Jonathan Stroud, 2013: 10).

Then, there is Thirty-five Portland Row, the headquarters of Lockwood and Co. agency. It is a place where Lockwood, Lucy and George live and take request from clients.

Thirty-five Portland Row, the building that would function as both home and headquarters for the operatives of Lockwood & Co., was an unexpected sort of place (Jonathan Stroud, 2013: 100).

Later, Combe Carey Hall is introduced as the place that Mr. Fairfax owns. It is one of the most haunted houses in England and it is a place where Lockwood, Lucy and George have to put their lives on to solve the problems there. It becomes the last place where the mysteries are finally revealed.

Fittes agents were the best, we all knew that. And three of them had died in Combe Carey Hall! To follow them in, without time for proper preparation, would be bordering on madness. The Red Room? The Screaming Staircase? (Jonathan Stroud, 2013: 248).

While reading this novel, the readers will imagine every setting of place that the author states clearly in the novel. The description and information about the setting in every scene in this novel is explained in detail. The author explains every part of the settings that build the imagination of the readers, so it will make the readers feel the creeping fear about the places that are presented in the novel. This way, it will give more horrifying points when the agents fight against the dangerous ghosts in the story.

3.1.4. Style

Nurgiyantoro states that style is a way of speaking of the author in the prose or how an author reveals something that will be put forward (1995: 276). In this novel, the author uses simple and clear words in the dialogues to describe a humour in serious situation in the novel. The readers, then, can easily understand, guess and analyze what the storyline of the humours are about. For example is when Lucy is interviewed by Lockwood, as shown in quotations below.

After a few minutes I gave up. 'I'm sorry,' I said at last, 'I can't detect anything.'

Lockwood nodded. 'I should hope not. This is the cup George keeps his toothbrush in. Good. On to the next.' He picked up the cup and tossed it across to the plump boy, who caught it with a snort of mirth.

I felt myself go cold; I knew my cheeks were scarlet. I took hold of my rucksack, and stood abruptly. 'I'm not here to be made fun of,' I said. 'I'll find my own way out.' (Jonathan Stroud, 2013: 95-96).

Those paragraphs show that Lucy is angry about the way she is interviewed. She feels like being fooled by that test. Those dialogues will make the readers laugh, because they can feel how Lucy's feelings from those dialogues. Embarrassed and angry are the obvious feelings that the readers can tell from those dialogues. This scene is presented in serious situation, but the author manages in making it in a humorous way, so the readers will laugh when they read this scene.

Even though this novel is about the horror of the ghosts and full of suspense, the author presents it with great dialogues that will make the reader laugh. Therefore, the readers will enjoy the frightening feeling alongside with the funny side of the story in this novel. There are still many humorous dialogues in this novel that will make the reader laugh. Even if it is in the serious and dangerous situations, the humour will still be there.

3.2. The Weaknesses of Jonathan Stroud's Lockwood & Co.: The Screaming Staircase

This novel has weaknesses besides its strengths. The stand out weakness in this novel is the death of the Fairfax Iron Company's Chairman, William Fairfax, as the anti-climax. The anti-climax of the plot is not like what the readers expect. Abrams

states, "Plot is constituted by its events and actions, as these are rendered and ordered toward achieving particular artistic and emotional effects" (1999: 224). He just dies easily after seeing ghost Annie. It does not leave any impression. The suspense of the story decreases dramatically just like that. It feels rather boring to read and it has no surprise at all. The readers may think that the last chapter should be more complicated, surprising and leaving emotional effects.

In addition, there are several fragments of the story that are not exposed and portrayed that it makes the readers get a big question mark and feel confused about some parts of the story. For example, when a scene where DEPRAC is more focus in Fairfax's things than in his crime, as shown in below paragraph.

I wonder what else DEPRAC's concealing?' I said. 'Did you see how quickly they moved into that place, and started taking away material? It's almost as if they were more interested in Fairfax's suit and helmet than in his crimes. (Jonathan Stroud, 2013:397).

It leaves many questions, because the reasons are not explained in this novel. The readers only get the curious feeling about that matter. The other example, there is no news about Fairfax Iron Company. Whether the company still continues in business or not, the readers can only wonder.

Fairfax himself had no direct heirs. It turned out that he had never married, and had no children of his own. So perhaps Annabel Ward had been the love of his life, after all (Jonathan Stroud, 2013:393).

From those sentences, the readers can see that Fairfax does not have any heirs. He is still single until he dies. Therefore, the fortune of his company is not clearly explained in this novel and it makes a weakness to this novel.

4. Conclusions

Lockwood and Co.: The Screaming Staircase is a great work by Jonathan Stroud. It tells a story about London that has been affected by a horrifying epidemic of haunting ghosts. A number of Psychic Investigations Agencies have appeared to overcome the dangerous ghosts. Lockwood & Co. agency is the core agency in this novel that faces many complex problems.

This novel was written in simple sentences that are easy to understand but has a good meaning and message for the readers. In addition, the strength values in this novel make it as a good reading. This novel has strengths in a theme about responsibility in life and a detail explanation of settings and characters. Besides that, this novel also has other strength that make the readers feel the feelings and emotions experienced by the characters through the author's writing style in this novel.

However, everything that has strengths also has weaknesses. The explicit weakness of this novel is about some fragments of the story that are not exposed and portrayed clearly. It leaves vagueness to the readers about those fragments. Then, another weakness is in the particular part of the plot. It is not surprising and exciting.

Therefore, considering those points above, this novel is worth reading. This novel will bring entertainment to the readers with its contents. Readers should be prepared to feel the terrors that will make them shudder. It is recommended to anyone who likes ghost stories with a lot of humours and mysteries.

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